

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW**  
**Vice President, Public Policy, Advocacy and Organizing**  
**Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.**  
**In support of raised Senate Bill 1178 *An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days***  
**March 9, 2023**

Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez and honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Vice President, Public Policy, Advocacy and Organizing at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in strong support of raised Senate Bill 1178 *An Act Expanding Connecticut Paid Sick Days*. As the state's largest provider of family planning and sexual and reproductive health care to over 50,000 patients at 14 health centers across the state, Planned Parenthood believes all people should have access to quality, affordable health care as a basic human right as well as the ability and resources to make their own health care decisions with dignity — regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance or immigration status.

Planned Parenthood believes that every individual has the right to determine their own reproductive destiny and understands that right is directly linked to the conditions in their communities. That includes the right to plan their families, live in safe and healthy communities, and to have full control of their body, life, and future. As advocates for reproductive freedom, we must consider all aspects of a person's life including those that affect their economic stability. Every person deserves the economic security to care for themselves and their family with dignity. We know firsthand, through patients we see in our health centers, the juggling act people have to play each month to pay their bills, care for their families, and meet their basic needs. That's why we were proud to be a part of the campaign to pass our state's paid sick leave law in 2011 but it's well past time to improve our law because it leaves too many workers behind. Recent estimates show that just 11% of employed workers in Connecticut meet the criteria to be eligible for paid sick days under our current law. This is unacceptable in a state that thankfully passed one of the most generous and inclusive paid family medical leave laws in the country in 2019.

As we continue to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, access to paid sick leave has never been more critical. The lack of paid leave pushes people out of the workforce and harms women and people of color who have been most affected by the pandemic. Without paid leave, a public health crisis for workers became a national economic crisis and a crisis for millions of families. Inequality in access to paid sick leave only deepens the harm and economic injustice. Not having sick days remains a significant barrier to health care access, despite increased affordability of preventive health care services under the Affordable Care Act. Workers without paid sick days are less likely to go to the doctor or access preventive care, such as cancer screenings, annual physicals, Pap smears and flu shots.<sup>i</sup> This is an urgent racial, reproductive and gender justice issue.

We urge this committee to support S.B. 1178. We thank Governor Lamont for introducing H.B. 6668 and prioritizing paid sick days in his budget recommendations but it's not going far enough to truly modernize our law and in fact would still leave many workers behind including LGBTQ+ individuals, single individuals, and grandparents. After signing one of the most inclusive family definitions in our paid family medical leave law, which we were proud to partner with the Administration on, this is unacceptable to have such a limiting definition as H.B. 6668 does. Families are constantly evolving and take many forms including blended families, single-parent families, LGBTQ+ families, chosen families, and multigenerational families. Any policy that leaves families who are most marginalized in our state out is unfair and unjust.

Another essential update in S.B. 1178 is eliminating the employer size threshold to cover all employees, regardless of where they work. This will ensure domestic workers are included in legislation so that they are not forced to choose between taking care of themselves and providing for their families. Paid sick days are critical to essential workers, including domestic workers. The majority of domestic and essential workers are women and people of color and are least likely to have access to paid sick days right now as they continue to work on the frontlines of the crisis. Without paid sick days, workers are forced to either go to work sick or miss their paycheck and, in some cases, lose their job entirely.

It's also critical to eliminate the waiting period for an employee to use the paid sick time which they've accrued which S.B. 1178 allow workers to use paid sick days immediately after the commencement of employment. This helps workers, specifically those who work part time, to be able to take the time that they need when they need it and is more in touch with the reality of getting sick. Another important addition is this bill will allow workers to use paid sick time when their place of work or child's school/place of care is closed by public officials for a public health emergency.

Planned Parenthood will continue to fight for policies that protect the rights of all people to ensure our patients and communities have what they need to live healthy and self-determined lives. We urge you to support S.B. 1178 to protect the basic rights of Connecticut workers and make the best expansions to our paid sick day law we can. Connecticut must continue to be a leader in workplace equity. While we appreciate the Governor's initiative, H.B. 6668 will not get us there, and would instead keep us among the weakest laws in the country. This improvement in expanding our paid sick days policy in S.B. 1178 and along with our paid family leave policy will help guarantee and promote the health and economic security of all Connecticut residents and allow families to thrive instead of struggling to survive. We thank you for your time and consideration and urge the committee vote favorably for S.B. 1178.

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<sup>i</sup> Paid Sick Days Improves Public Health <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/paid-sick-days-improve-our-public-health.pdf>